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TELEGRAM

March 20, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1349 - UNKNOWN)
TAGS: OIIP, KMDR
Captions: None
Subject: MEDIA REACTION AND PUBLIC OPINION: WAR AGAINST IRAQ
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 01349

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: PAO
INFO: ECON POL AMB DCM
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ACTION: PAO

DISSEMINATION: PAO
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: PAO:KVANDEVATE
DRAFTED: PAO:AHOSHAN
CLEARED: PAO:TPONCE

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RHRMDAB RUCJACC RUCQSOC
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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8961
RUENAAA/SECNAV WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0610
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0668
RHRMDAB/COMUSNAVCENT
RUCJACC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
RUCQSOC/USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL//PA//

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP; NEA/PPD; NEA/RA; INR
SECDEF FOR OASD/PA
USCINCCENT FOR POLAD
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH; PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION AND PUBLIC OPINION: WAR AGAINST IRAQ

1. SUMMARY: THE INITIATION OF MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ
ENVELOPED PRINT AND SATELLITE TV COVERAGE IN THE UAE MEDIA. ABU
DHABI TV IS REPORTING THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS LIVE FROM BAGHDAD,
WASHINGTON, AND OTHER PLACES IN THE REGION. ABU DHABI TV ALSO

CARRIED LIVE SADDAM HUSSEIN'S MARCH 20TH SPEECH AND PRESIDENT BUSH'S MARCH 19TH ADDRESS TO THE NATION EXPLAINING THE ONSET OF MILITARY ACTION. AN "AL-KHALEEJ" EDITORIAL NOTES THAT IRAQ IS ONLY THE BEGINNING AND OTHER ARAB CAPITALS WILL FOLLOW. MEANWHILE, AN "AKHBAR AL-ARAB" EDITORIAL BLAMES SADDAM FOR THE SUFFERING OF IRAQIS AND THE WAR. END SUMMARY.

12. UNDER THE HEADLINE 'A ROAD MAP IS PENETRATING ARAB CAPITALS,' SHARJAH-BASED PAN-ARAB DAILY "AL-KHALEEJ" EDITORIALIZED ON 3/20:

"THE QUESTION NOW IS NOT WHETHER OR NOT THE WAR WILL START, BUT WHAT COMES AFTER IT AND HOW LONG WILL .S. TROOPS STAY IN IRAQ? THE MOST DANGEROUS QUESTION IS THE LEVEL OF COORDINATION BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND TEL AVIV IN DRAWING NEW GEOPOLITICAL MAPS AND RESHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE REGION. IT HAS BECOME KNOWN THAT ONCE U.S. TROOPS ENTER IRAQ THEY WILL NOT DEPART, WHICH HAS BEEN CONFIRMED BY NUMEROUS AMERICAN OFFICIALS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF CEMENTING PEACE AND STABILITY, THE ELIMINATION OF WMD, AND CURTAILING ANY ETHNIC DISPUTES ... IRAQ WILL ONLY BE THE STARTING POINT TO RE-MAPPING THE MIDDLE EAST, AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ISRAEL WILL PLAY A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE IN THIS ... STATEMENTS OF AMERICAN OFFICIALS CLARIFY THAT THE WAR AGAINST IRAQ IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP. THE LIST OF NATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHICH THE U.S. INSISTS ON LABELING AS 'TERRORISTS' IS EXTREMELY LONG, EXCEPT FOR ISRAEL. THEREFORE, THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE WAS NOT MEANT TO 'LIBERATE' IRAQIS, BUT TO ACHIEVE A NEW AMERICAN STRATEGY IN THE REGION..."

13. ABU DHABI-BASED PAN-ARAB DAILY "AKHBAR AL-ARAB" 3/20 EDITORIALIZED:

"...THE U.S. AND A HANDFUL OF ITS ALLIES INSIST ON DECLARING WAR IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS, WHILE ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE REGIME IN IRAQ REJECTS SHOULDERING ITS HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD AND THE ENTIRE NATION AND INSISTS ON RETAINING POWER UNTIL THE LAST IRAQI CITIZEN ... WE HAVE TO ADMIT THAT WE ARE FACING A VICIOUS POWER WHICH HAS ITS OWN AGENDA ... AND THE RIGHT THING TO DO IN SUCH A SITUATION IS TO SAVE WHAT CAN BE SAVED AND NOT SACRIFICE THE NATION FOR THE SAKE OF A FEW INDIVIDUALS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY THEMSELVES HAVE PROVIDED A JUSTIFICATION FOR AN UNPRECEDENTED INTERVENTION IN THE REGION'S AFFAIRS ..."

PUBLIC OPINION READ-OUT

14. THE GENERAL MOOD IN THE UAE IS SIMILAR TO THAT ELSEWHERE IN THE REGION. MANY EXPRESS FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION AND DEEP SADNESS ABOUT WHAT THEY VIEW AS A TRAGIC ENDING TO THE CRISIS. MOST OF POST'S INTERLOCUTORS ARE CONVINCED THAT WAR HAS BECOME INEVITABLE AS A RESULT OF SADDAM HUSSEIN'S STUBBORNNESS AND REFUSAL TO STEP DOWN TO AVERT A DESTRUCTIVE WAR AGAINST IRAQ. THIS BELIEF IS VERY STRONG IN THE UAE AND REFLECTS THE OFFICIAL LINE OF THE UAEG FOLLOWING THE INITIATIVE IT PROPOSED DURING THE SHARM EL-SHEIKH OIC SUMMITS. HOWEVER, THE UAE PUBLIC IS EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR FOR OTHER ARAB AND NEIGHBORING NATIONS AND FOR THE REGION AS A WHOLE. THE MAIN CONCERN HERE IS WORRY FOR THE IRAQI PEOPLE AND POSSIBLE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES DURING THE WAR.

15. ONE UAE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE SUMMED UP THE POPULAR MOOD THUS: "EVERYBODY IS CONFUSED. HOW TO REMOVE SADDAM WITHOUT WAR? WAS IT RIGHT TO LAUNCH A WAR? NOBODY IS HAPPY WITH THE WAR, NOBODY. WE ARE THINKING ABOUT THE IRAQI PEOPLE AND HOW TO HELP THEM. WE HOPE THAT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN TO SADDAM AT THE LAST MINUTE. I WAS NOT FOR PROLONGING THE INSPECTIONS, BUT I AM VERY CONCERNED ABOUT CIVILIAN CASUALTIES. IF THERE ARE NOT TOO MANY OF THEM, THE US WON'T MAKE TOO MANY ENEMIES IN THE ARAB WORLD."

WAHBA